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It Would Take More Than a Memoir to Explain E. Howard Hunt

UNDERCOVER: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent. By E. Howard Hunt. Putnam. 338 pages. \$8.95.

By Harry Rositzke

The name and face of E. Howard Hunt, his professional White House career, and his personal tragedies have become a familiar and closely documented segment of the Watergate story. Hunt has emerged as a cool, articulate extrovert with unquestioning loyalty to his superiors and uncritical anti-Communist convictions. Unfortunately, he has become the public prototype of a CIA intelligence officer.

WHAT IS OF main interest in his Memoirs is not the almost 200-page Watergate narrative, but the CIA career that led Colson to hire him; that, and the sources of his loyalty and anti-Communism.

Although less than 75 pages of "Undercover" are devoted to his 21 years with CIA, the pattern of his work as a "secret agent" emerges with some clarity. When he was recruited by Frank Wisner in Paris in the spring of 1949, he joined the new action agency, the Office of Policy Coordination, set up the previous year to carry out secret political, psychological, and paramilitary warfare operations against the Russians. With his writing talent, his ability to handle people, and his instinct for action, he concentrated for the next 20 years on political and propaganda ac-

tion assignments — not on espionage or counterespionage.

The action operations he depicts cover a broad range from disrupting Communist Party meetings with stink-bombs to fortifying the anti-Soviet inclinations of the President of Uruguay. In Mexico City he runs such "outside agents" as Bill Buckley, a number of American businessmen, a young anti-Communist priest, and several student leaders. In Tokyo he supervises or coordinates radio broadcasts and leaflet drops into Mainland China, reviews and terminates a multi-million dollar propaganda project involving a feckless Japanese samurai, and disrupts a Chinese trade fair by air-dropping over Tokyo thousands of bogus invitations for free food and beer at the fair. In Montevideo he works out an anti-Communist program with the head of the police and Army intelligence, and reaches the height of his professional career by befriending a minority-party politician who becomes the president of Uruguay.

HUNT'S POLITICAL talents were also employed in both the Guatemalan and Cuban paramilitary operations, in the first as chief of propaganda and political action, in the second as the senior staff man assigned to organize Cuban emigre political leaders into a broadly representative "government-in-exile." On the latter he has written a separate book.

In the course of his narrative Hunt also refers to several "surreptitious entry" projects with which he was connected or knew about — one into the Guatemalan Embassy in Mexico City to secure cryptographic materials and another into a Communist Embassy in Montevideo. In each case the entry was carried out by a team of specialists from Washington.

His CIA career, in short, was not in espionage work but in covert action. He operated overseas "undercover" but not as a "spy" in any literal sense, a case-officer with the task of developing and recruiting foreign agents with access to classified information of interest to Washington. Espionage is a somewhat more demanding task than finding collaborators for anti-Communist action programs, and his former colleagues can perhaps be forgiven for not wanting to be identified with him in the public mind as a typical intelligence officer.

HIS OWN HABIT of loyalty and "unquestioning obedience to orders" he attributes to his indoctrination at the Naval Academy, but there is nothing in his memoirs to explain the personal or family origins of his deep anti-Communism. In Paris in 1948 he finds himself in "a briar patch of liberalism" in the European Cooperation Administration whose members display "ambivalent feelings toward the USSR." Frank Wisner, the man who recruited him for CIA, seems to Hunt "a hard-line anti-Communist." The murder of two Americans in Austria, ostensibly by the Russians, leads to his conviction that Soviet Communism is "a bloody and implacable enemy, ready to kill and destroy on the slightest provocation — or even on suspicion." Transposed to the Western Hemisphere, this simple prism of the "bad guys" sees the enemy as the Guatemalan Communists, Castro, the "treasonist" Ellsberg, student radicals, and almost — it appears — all Democrats.

Clearly, this is a man not given to self-examination. It is reassuring that E. Howard Hunt finally saw through the man in the White House to whom he had been obedient.

Harry Rositzke is a former employee of the CIA.